

Expanded guidance on test administration decisions for second-grade students

Overview

The purpose of this document is to provide additional clarity to educators about which test—the MAP® Growth™ K-2 test or MAP Growth 2-5 test—to administer to second-grade students. This decision should take into account the current development of students, especially their reading ability, as well as the content to which those students are being exposed. This document is meant to be a companion to our existing [MAP Growth grade-level test guidance \(K-2 to 2-5\) document](#). In this document, we provide an overview of what factors should be considered when making the decision about which test is most appropriate for a student (or group of students), and outline what the implications may be for students when the transition occurs earlier or later than when they are developmentally ready.

Introduction

The NWEA® MAP Growth K-2 and MAP Growth 2-5 tests were specifically designed to measure different aspects of student achievement in developmentally appropriate ways. MAP Growth K-2 was designed for students who are not yet ready to read independently and provides audio support to test takers. Conversely, MAP Growth 2-5 was designed for independent readers. Given these design differences, you should consider a variety of factors and choose the assessment that is developmentally appropriate for your students. The following table provides an overview of how the reading tests differ for students, with a focus on these differences from the perspective of student reading ability, which is one of the primary factors that should be considered when making decisions about which test (irrespective of subject) to administer to students.

| | MAP GROWTH K-2 | MAP GROWTH 2-5 |
|-------------------------------|--|---|
| Designed for whom? | Students in early grades who are pre, emergent, or beginning readers | Students in second to fifth grade who are independent readers (or are starting to demonstrate independence) |
| What's being measured? | Foundational reading skills (including phonics, phonological awareness, and concepts of print) as well as comprehension, vocabulary, and elements of writing | Independent reading comprehension and vocabulary |
| Available support? | Audio support (questions are read) for all students | No audio support available (except for students in need of accommodations such as text-to-speech) |

In general, students in kindergarten and first grade should take the MAP Growth K-2 reading and mathematics assessment, and students in third to fifth grade should take the MAP Growth 2-5 reading and mathematics assessment. However, the decision around what assessment to administer to second-grade students is not always straightforward. Following are the NWEA recommendations for choosing the appropriate assessment for second-grade students in either mathematics or reading.

1. The ideal situation: Individual student

In a perfect world, you should **choose the assessment to match the needs of each individual student, and the student should generally remain on the same test over the course of the school year.**¹ At a very high level, second-grade students who can read independently should take the MAP Growth 2-5 test, and those second-grade students who cannot would be better served taking the MAP Growth K-2 test. There is NO single cut score or threshold that should govern this decision. Instead of relying just on previous MAP Growth scores, we recommend that you **consider all available evidence** about a student's ability to read independently and the content the student is being taught when making the decision about which assessment to administer.

For example, how much and to what kind of content has a student been exposed, and what is the student currently being taught? What are her scores on classroom assessments and homework? What do results from her MAP Reading Fluency assessment say about her reading ability? Are there other indications that she will (or will not) become an independent reader sometime during this academic year? Is she an English Learner? Does she have a disability or other special need? It is crucial that all of these factors are taken into account when determining if the student will be able to read independently well enough to engage with the MAP Growth 2-5 assessment. If not, the MAP Growth K-2 test will likely be better for her.

What about students who have very high or very low RIT scores from previous MAP Growth assessments? Prior MAP Growth scores are informative and should be considered but should not be the sole factor on which to base your decision.

For instance, if a second-grade student took the MAP Growth 2-5 reading test in the fall and received a score of 170, we could surmise that the student is not yet ready to read independently. However, that score of 170 should not be viewed as the absolute threshold in making the determination about which test is more appropriate for the student; instead, that score gives us some indication that the student would likely be better served by taking the MAP Growth K-2 test. Why? Because the MAP Growth K-2 test is designed specifically for emergent readers and provides students with audio support (the questions are read). In contrast, the MAP Growth 2-5 test provides no audio support to students. When the design of the assessment matches well with the reading level of the student, the score provides a lot of useful information about the reading ability of a student.

When a student is struggling with even basic reading skills, the MAP Growth 2-5 test (either mathematics or reading) would not be a great assessment for her. Given that she likely wouldn't be able to independently read the test questions, her responses won't provide an accurate indication of her achievement level. Put differently, the majority of the questions would be too hard for her, she would likely get them wrong, and her score would not be very useful to her teachers or her school. We recommend giving the MAP Growth K-2 test to second-grade students who are clearly not yet able to read independently, and all evidence suggests they won't be reading independently at any point during their second-grade year. This recommendation is not made to simply protect students from a test that would be too hard, but to match students to a test that would yield the best data to inform instruction.

Similarly, if a second-grade student had a prior score above 190 on the MAP Growth K-2 reading test, it would likely be inappropriate to continue to administer the MAP Growth K-2 reading test to her. Again, the score of 190 is not a definitive cut score. But, a score that high gives us a lot of confidence the student has demonstrated her ability as an independent reader. The MAP Growth 2-5 test is the more appropriate assessment for her because it matches her reading level well—the test will provide teachers with information about her ability to read independently and comprehend the text she is reading. As a result, her achievement will be measured more accurately, and her score will be useful to her teachers.

To reiterate—scores of 170 on the MAP Growth 2-5 reading and mathematics tests and 190 on the MAP Growth K-2 reading test (200 in mathematics) are included in the NWEA transition guidance to be used as *guides* when making the decision about which test to administer to students, *not* definitive cut scores that clearly identify which test to administer to students. Some individual cases merit special consideration. If, for example, a student is an English Learner or has a learning disability, you should consider his or her learning needs when making the decision about which test to assign to the student.

To summarize, when possible, choose the assessment for each individual student that matches the content the student is being taught, is aligned with the student's reading ability level, and considers *all* evidence on a student's reading ability when making that decision.

1. This is especially true when student growth is used for myriad high-stakes decisions. If a student is on the verge of being an independent reader and may be ready for the MAP Growth 2-5 test at some point during the school year, we recommend that students be transitioned to the 2-5 test at the start of the school year to ensure that student growth is measured on the same test over the course of the year.

2. The feasible solution: Class or grade-level decision

What if circumstances don't allow you to choose an assessment for each individual student? **If the same assessment must be given to all students in second-grade, we recommend that you use the MAP Growth 2-5 test, not the MAP Growth K-2 test, for students throughout their entire second-grade year.**

Data from the MAP Growth 2-5 assessment will be more useful to your school, because when you give the MAP Growth 2-5 assessment starting in fall of second-grade, a stable growth trajectory in reading and mathematics achievement can be mapped out for each student. If you start with the MAP Growth K-2 test and then switch to the MAP Growth 2-5 test in the middle or at the end of the year, the resulting growth trajectory will be less informative. Here's why:

MAP Growth K-2 is not designed for independent readers. Most questions would not be developmentally appropriate for students who can read complex texts. They could easily get a lot of questions correct, which would lead to their scores being artificially inflated and not particularly useful for making educational decisions for students.

To illustrate, it would be similar to giving an independent reader a test with only questions on letter-sound recognition. She would answer all the questions correctly and her score would not be very informative because it doesn't tell you where her true reading level is—it only tells you her level is somewhere above letter-sound recognition.

If a student takes the MAP Growth K-2 test (either subject) and gets an artificially inflated score, then takes the MAP Growth 2-5 in the winter and gets a score that better represents her achievement level, the difference between the two scores (her "growth" between fall and winter) could look very low, or even show sharp declines. This is not because her achievement developed slowly (or declined altogether), but because the fall test administered to the student

was not developmentally appropriate for her, and her fall score was not an informative estimate of her achievement level.

For these reasons, we do not recommend giving the MAP Growth K-2 assessment to second-grade students unless all available evidence suggests they will not become independent readers at any point during their second-grade year. Most students develop skills to read independently during second-grade. **Transitioning second-grade students to the MAP Growth 2-5 assessment at the beginning of the school year will generally result in more informative test scores and interpretations of improvement in a student's achievement level.**

3. The scenario to avoid: Using MAP Growth K-2 for all second-graders

We strongly caution *against* giving all second-grade students the MAP Growth K-2 test.² Most students become independent readers prior to or sometime during second-grade. A small percentage of second-grade students who are not able to read independently might find the MAP Growth 2-5 assessments difficult, even a bit frustrating. In this situation, when multiple datapoints indicate the student is not yet ready to read independently, the student can be tested on the MAP Growth K-2 test.

This is an example of why we ultimately recommend choosing an assessment for individual students based on his or her reading level. However, **if one common test must be administered to all second-grade students, we recommend using the MAP Growth 2-5 test, not the MAP Growth K-2 test (see the previous section).** The MAP Growth 2-5 reading test will provide a better indication of the independent reading level for second-grade students and will provide more actionable data to your educators to inform their approach to working with their students.

2. Except in uncommon situations where this decision is warranted based on the development needs of ALL second-grade students within a school, indicating that all students would be best served taking the MAP Growth K-2 test.



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